# FOURTH CHURCH PULPIT

# July 7, 2002

# THE POWER OF A DREAM

## John M. Buchanan

**With malice towards none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.**

Abraham Lincoln
*The Second Inaugural Address*
March 4, 1865

FOURTH
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A LIGHT IN THE CITY

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**THE POWER OF A DREAM**
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**JOHN M. BUCHANAN, PASTOR**
**FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**Psalm 67**
**Isaiah 42:5-9**
**Philippians 2:1-11**

*We thank you, dear God, for the precious gift of freedom: for the right to decide to be here this morning, or not be here; for the privilege of worshiping in security and comfort. But may we never be so comfortable that we take this freedom for granted. Startle us, O God, with your goodness and presence and your love, which calls us to live intentionally, courageously, faithfully, in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

Among the personal memorabilia I have accumulated over the years, placed on shelves, hung on walls, in cabinets and ultimately storage boxes, two 8-1/2 x 11 pictures have remained. They are stylized portraits of two men who have continued to fascinate me and in whom my interest has continued to grow: Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln.

I can remember Churchill, and in my home Abraham Lincoln was always revered. There were books about both, and I continue to read biographies and histories of them and their times. Both Lincoln and Churchill were elected to lead their nations in the midst of unprecedented danger. Great Britain in the 1940s, the United States in the 1860s were both vulnerable, unprepared for what was ahead, and discouraged. The future looked bleak; events were swirling out of control. It is commonly agreed that Churchill and Lincoln saved their nations. Both called their people to new sacrifice by way of a compelling vision: Churchill's "Blood, Sweat, and Tears," Lincoln's Union government "of the people, by the people, for the people . . . humanity's last best hope." Both were remarkably accessible. Churchill waded through the rubble of bombed and burned London neighborhoods with his bowler, cane, and cigar. Lincoln walked and rode daily in the streets of Washington and received citizens in his office. Both served a cause larger than self, a cause that transcended the ordinary concerns of prosperity and security. Both articulated for their fellow citizens a vision of what the future could be. Both paid a lot of attention to words, written and spoken. Both were able to communicate their vision, their call to sacrifice and service, in clear and compelling ways. Churchill's legendary speeches in the House of Commons were not extemporaneous, as many assumed. In fact, they were written, memorized, and rehearsed. Lincoln, we now know, took great pains to write most of his speeches, editing, re-editing, scratching out words, and substituting better words. And both were flawed human beings, and each has many critics.

My interest in Lincoln as an extraordinary leader leads me to conclude that part of his greatness, to be sure, was timing, the extraordinary historic situation in which he was called to lead. But beyond that I conclude that his greatness was a product of his *vision* for the United States of

America and the way he became a *servant* of that vision and a servant of the people who had chosen him to be their leader.

There's a good new Lincoln book out this summer, *Lincoln's Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural.* Written by Ronald White, dean and professor of American religious history at San Francisco Presbyterian Theological Seminary, it is a careful analysis of the speech Lincoln delivered on the steps of the capitol on March 4, 1865, on the occasion of his inauguration to a second term as president. The speech, for those who are interested in the effective and economic use of language, was just 703 words in length, 505 of them words of one syllable. It took Lincoln between six and seven minutes to deliver it. That's quite a model for those of us who stand up weekly and go on for 20 or 25 minutes, week after week.

It was quite a moment. The war was nearly over. Finally the Union armies were prevailing, and the end was in sight. In spite of rain and oceans of mud, Washington was in a celebrative mood and, one thing more, a vengeful mood. People in the inauguration crowds that day wore medals and ribbons with words such as "No Compromise with Armed Rebels," "A Foe to Traitors." The year before, there had been a massacre of 300 Union troops, most of them African American, at Fort Pillow, Tennessee. Lincoln was "besieged with calls for retribution." Northerners were demanding the execution of an equal number of Confederate prisoners.

And so the crowd that gathered to hear their victorious president speak expected triumphalism, revenge, or, at the very least, satisfaction. Instead, what Abraham Lincoln did in 700 words was ask them to think carefully about a vision of the nation after the war. Instead of triumphalism, he asked the people of North and South, victors and vanquished, to ponder the mystery that "both read the same Bible and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully." That is a very mature theological statement. Politicians constantly invoke God's blessing on the cause of their own nation. When a federal court decided that "Under God" doesn't belong in the Pledge of Allegiance, the politicians gathered on the steps of the Capitol and sang "God Bless America." Few have had the courage after September 11 to suggest that every singing of "God Bless America" should be followed by "And God Bless the World." Reinhold Niebuhr said that Lincoln was a better theologian than the religious leaders, all of whom—North and South—were invoking God's blessing on their own cause. Lincoln struggled a lot with theological issues, God's role, God's activity in the world. And his religious vision for the new nation that would have to be created after the war included an inclusive theology of a God who transcended partisan causes, transcended even nations, a God who is God of all nations, a God who created and loves and works for the peace and salvation of all people. That is an amazing vision—and still a very relevant word, particularly after September 11.

Instead of retribution, Lincoln asked for compassion, based on an inclusive, unifying vision of the whole nation, South and North. Garry Wills points out in his book on the Gettysburg Address that before Lincoln, the plural verb was always used—"The United States are . . ." After Lincoln it was "The United State is . . ." Lincoln's vision of union became a fragile reality. One nation.

Standing on the steps of the Capitol, March 4, 1865, he said:

> With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.

Instead of regionalism and nationalism—the motto of the Confederacy, for instance, was "Deo Vindice" (God Will Avenge)—Lincoln challenged all Americans to live up to a greater, larger and better vision, "a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves and with all nations."

Forty-one days, later Lincoln was assassinated. Professor White concludes that his second inaugural speech was Lincoln's "last will and testament to America" and that in a time when "leadership and integrity seem in short supply," Lincoln and his words stride across the centuries with the capacity to both convict and heal" (p. 201).

Centuries before, a man by the name of Paul wrote to the early Christians in the city of Philippi:

> If then there is any encouragement in Christ, . . . let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, . . . who . . . emptied himself ."

Lincoln's style of leadership was remarkably selfless, in a way consistent with the advice in the Bible. And there is a lot to learn there. No topic is more important, or more discussed and written about these days, than that one: leadership. The late Robert Greenleaf, director of management and research at AT&T, professor at Harvard and MIT, came up with the intriguing and important notion that great leaders are first of all servants. Servant Leadership he called it, based on a Herman Hesse story about an expedition of travelers whose central figure, Leo, does all the menial chores and sustains the other travelers with his spirit and songs. When Leo leaves, the group falls into disarray and the expedition is abandoned. Later they discover that Leo was actually the head of the huge organization that was sponsoring the project.

"The servant leader," Greenleaf taught, "is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve . . . makes sure other people's highest priority needs are being served. . . . The best test of leadership is simply—do those served grow as persons. Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous?" (*Servant Leadership,* pp.7-13).

That is a rather different notion of what leadership is and means. It fits Lincoln, I think, and in an amazingly consistent way, it reflects the ethical challenge St. Paul put to the early Christian church in Philippi—and to us, to you and me, here and now.

The question the first Christians asked and the question Paul addresses is "what difference does faith in Jesus Christ make in the way life is lived. How shall belief and trust in Jesus Christ work itself out within the contours of my life lived in the world?" Paul is no abstract philosopher; he

moves from theology to anthropology, from beliefs to behavior, and in so doing sounds a lot like Robert Greenleaf.

- Do nothing from selfish ambition
- Regard others as better than yourselves
- Look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

And then Paul describes Jesus in terms of his emptying himself and living out of his obedience to God—even to death on the cross—the perfect servant leader.

Paul's compelling vision is of a people, a church, united in its faith in Christ, a church that lives in the world with the mindset of Jesus. Christians are to live individually and together, as the church, as Jesus lived in the world. "Have the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus," Paul said. Paul's vision for us—individually and as a church—is servant leader.

The world desperately needs that kind of thinking. Our nation needs it. David Gergen wrote a feature in the *New York Times* two weeks ago that asked an important question: "How can we transform the goodwill and willingness to sacrifice since September 11 into meaningful and lasting changes in our communities and culture?" Gergen worries that a great opportunity is slipping away, that as the shock of 9/11 wears off, most Americans are merely spectators in the war on terrorism, affected only by an occasional inconvenience at the airport. While the government worries about security, Gergen laments that there is no call from the White House or Congress for common sacrifice for a better future. Great American leaders, Gergen observes, recognized that in order to mobilize support for a long war asked for common sacrifice in service of a "galvanizing vision of what life would be like after guns were silenced." And then Gergan makes a stunning suggestion:

> The President could roll back his tax cuts (which mainly benefit the wealthiest one percent of Americans) and propose that the savings be redirected toward a broad social cause like improving the lives of children. If the war (against terrorism) is about securing their safety, after all, why should we not be equally concerned about securing their health and education? Why not seize this moment to make the war about something positive?

We need, David Gergen says, "a new sense of national purpose."

Ernest Campbell, one of my mentors from afar in the craft of preaching, used to remind his students that while your sermon may be directed to the chief justice of the Supreme Court, or the secretary of state, or the president of the United States, those people are not often in the congregation you are addressing. Remember who is out there, Campbell used to say. So—we don't affect national policy. But we do have convictions and a voice, and there are ways to be heard. And we have something else: we have a community that tries to live in the world, in the nation, in the city, with the mind of Christ in it.

And so until the government comes up with a common vision for our life as a people, the church certainly has one. And something more: a personal vision of faithful living, modeled on the mind

of Christ. The church does have a vision and a commitment to peace and justice and health and reconciliation and education for children and service as our marching orders. Tomorrow morning, more than 100 of our neighborhood children will enroll in our Summer Day program, specifically designed to add education and social support to young lives always vulnerable, particularly so in the summertime. And we have the model of faithful and full life in our work, our leisure, our volunteering, based on Jesus, our servant leader.

Susan Andrews, pastor of Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Maryland, told a story recently about having lunch with Jim Tooie, the new director of the White House Office of Faith-Based Initiatives. Susan is a liberal Democrat and has many reservations abut the use of governmental money for religious institutions. She changed he mind after lunch. This is how she tells it:

> Jim Tooie is a small, energetic man, with electric blue eyes and an engaging manner. A lifelong Catholic, he attends Mass every day at 6:30 a.m. He keeps his Bible on his desk. He is the father of four boys under the age of 10 with a fifth child on the way, and he identifies himself as a pro-life Democrat. Trained as a lawyer, Tooie worked for Senator Mark Hatfield. As part of that experience he found himself visiting Mother Teresa one day in India. And the experience changed his life. He was immediately handed a basin of warm water, a washcloth, and a gentle order to bathe a dying man—a grotesque skeleton who was covered with open sores and scabs. Now, Jim was too proud to admit that he was afraid to touch this wretched creature. So he meekly obeyed. And he ended up staying for two years.
>
> As a Catholic, he said, he had always been taught to experience Christ through the sacraments. So to meet Christ in the disturbing disguise of the poor, to be drawn into a personal relationship with Jesus through the lives of the least of these—this was both a revelation and a conversion for Jim Tooie. And that experience has refocused his life's work.

Susan Andrews became a supporter of the Faith-Based Initiatives because of Jim Tooie's vision—and his servant leadership.

Servant leadership is based on a vision of what the nation could be. Abraham Lincoln gave the nation a dream of what its precious union could mean: "With malice toward none, with clarity toward all. . . a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves and with all nations."

Lincoln served that vision and the government, the people, he believed were the last, best hope for the world, literally poured his life out, emptied himself, like Paul said Jesus did.

The bold challenge, the great adventure of being a Christian today, is to live out that vision, to be leaders, in whatever way we can, great or small: to lead on the job, at the office, in the board room, in our homes, our families, in our friendships and intimate personal relations—to live out the mandate to be a servant leader. To "do nothing from selfish ambition . . . to look not to your own interests but to the interests of others . . . to have the mind of Christ."

That is a powerful dream—powerful enough to effect change, in our lives, in the institutions we serve, in the world.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" the Bible says. That is true for nations, churches, and individuals.

"Have the same mind in you that is in Christ Jesus," the Bible says.

"The one who gives life away for my sake will find it," Jesus said.

Amen.

**Prayers of the People**
**By John A. Cairns, Dean, Academy for Faith and Life**

Eternal God, we give thanks for all that surrounds us this day. For your abundant creation and the fruit of the soil and sunshine; for the beauty of greens and golds, of reds and blues; for the fresh breeze that brings the promise of newness into our tired lives; for each waiting day with its latent treasures. Thank you, Creator God.

We thank you, as well, for the people who surround us. They show us your love as they offer their guidance and support. Their hands reach out to us in times of despair. Their voices offer encouragement; their smiles share affirmation. We are blessed to be in the midst of this caring community. Thank you, nurturing God.

The community that surrounds us also calls forth our prayers of intercession. And so we lift before you this morning the needs of our colleagues and companions. For all those who seek healing, who are broken in mind, in body, or in spirit, may you be their great Physician. For all those who are wrestling with difficult choices or weighing significant decisions, may you be their "wisdom from above." For all those who stand in harm's way, may you be their Protector and Defender. For all those who face the pressures of the 40- or 50- or 60-hour workweek that lies ahead, may you be their Anchor in the storm and their "still, small voice of calm."

O God, these are difficult days in which to live. We find ourselves constantly tempted by lifestyles that are less than faithful, that fail to honor you. Yet even when we try to ignore you, Good Shepherd, you are there. You awaken in us an awareness of your presence. You keep an eye on us. You stand ready to grab us so we do not slip or fall. May we, in our various journeys, be drawn toward you and find there our home.

What we ask for ourselves we also ask earnestly for others, particularly our leaders. May they know your presence when they feel alone; may they sense your strength when they feel threatened; may they hear your call for reconciliation when they shape their policies; may they remember your grace and mercy as they deal with one another. We pray for our president and his

cabinet and advisors, for all our legislators, judges, and public officials. We pray, as well, for the leaders of other nations, especially those whose governments are young or whose situations are perilous. We pray, too, for religious leaders, that their leadership may be trustworthy and faithful, offering a beacon of light and hope to an often-discouraged world.

O God, fill all our lives with light and hope. Keep watch over each of us. Empower us with the courage to live what we say we believe. And hear us as we join our voices in the prayer Jesus taught us, saying, Our Father . . .